



18th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Social Development

Report on Transition Matters

Chair: Mr. Shane Thompson

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Social Development is pleased to provide its *Report on Transition Matters* and commends it to the House.



Mr. Shane Thompson
Chair, Standing Committee on
Social Development

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
MANDATE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE	1
WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE.....	2
SCOSD by the Numbers.....	2
Highlights.....	2
Legislation	2
Children and Youth.....	2
After Care.....	3
TRANSITION MATTERS	4
NWT Housing Corporation.....	4
Housing	4
Department of Justice / Department of Health and Social Services	5
Intimate Partner and Family Violence.....	5
Department of Health and Social Services	6
Child and Family Services	6
Seniors	6
Anti-Poverty.....	7
Mental Health and Addictions.....	7
Department of Education, Culture and Employment.....	7
Childcare	7
Children and Youth.....	7
Service Delivery.....	8
Statutory Reviews.....	8
CONCLUSION	9

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Social Development (SCOSD) is one of the standing committees of the 18th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories charged with the responsibility of providing oversight for the ongoing business operations of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT).

The purpose of this report is twofold:

1. To briefly highlight the work completed by SCOSD during the 18th Assembly; and
2. To identify outstanding issues that may require consideration by SCOSD's successor Committee in the 19th Legislative Assembly.

MANDATE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The mandates of the Legislative Assembly's standing committees are set out in Appendix 3 to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly.¹ SCOSD is responsible for the following matters with respect to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Justice and the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation:

- reviewing multi-year business plans and budgets, bills, boards and agencies, including the Status of Women Council and programs for seniors, youth and persons with disabilities;
- reviewing departmental performance, including that of boards and agencies;
- considering issues related to homelessness; and
- considering any other matter referred by the House.

¹ *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*, May 27, 2015.

WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

SCOSD by the Numbers

23 – Number of bills or reports reviewed

55 – Number of public hearings held

22 – Number of communities outside Yellowknife visited by Committee

78 – Number of motions passed at the Committee stage to amend bills

6 – Number of Committee reports issued

197 – Number of Committee meetings

Highlights

During the 18th Assembly, SCOSD undertook work ranging from the review of departments' budgets and performance and the holding of public hearings on issues of interest to residents of the Northwest Territories (NWT) to the review of legislation.

SCOSD wishes to highlight the work it has undertaken in the following three areas during the 18th Assembly:

Legislation

In the course of the 18th Assembly, SCOSD reviewed 23 bills and moved a significant number of motions and recommendations to improve these pieces of legislation. The highly collaborative effort between our Committee, ministers and our respective officials in the review and amendment of Bill 40, Bill 41, Bill 45 and Bill 48 is particularly worth highlighting. These coordinated efforts, combined with the submissions and testimony provided in the course of our reviews, resulted in statutes that received overwhelming support in the House and that better serve the residents of the NWT.

Children and Youth

The GNWT committed in the *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2016-2019 (Revised)* (Mandate) to work towards transforming child and family services, including by conducting audits to ensure compliance with the *Child and Family Services Act* and developing caseload and workload measures for child protection in order to monitor and track the resources required to ensure compliance with the Act.² The undertaking and completion of annual compliance audits of Child and Family Services conducted by the Department of Health and Social Services were of particular interest

² Commitment 4.3.1, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

to SCOSD, as was our oversight of any subsequent responsive actions from the Department and the health authorities.

A priority of this Assembly was to make childcare available and affordable. In the Mandate, the GNWT committed to implement *Right from the Start: A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the Northwest Territories*, by working with stakeholders and communities to ensure the NWT has free play-based care for four year olds. A controversial component of the Early Childhood Development Action Plan tabled in June 2017 was the implementation of the Junior Kindergarten Program (JK). The rollout was to be accomplished by adjusting the pupil-teacher ratio just within the legislated threshold rather than infusing new money into the school system. Implementation was to take place over three years, beginning in small communities in 2014-15, and following in the regional centers in 2015-16 and Yellowknife in 2016-17.

Bill 16, *An Act to Amend the Education Act* proposed to enshrine JK and to regulate entitlement of access for JK students, who could be as young as three years and eight months. In addition, Bill 16 also proposed to reduce the mandatory minimum for school instructional hours.

In the course of our review of Bill 16, SCOSD heard significant frustration about the proposed rollout of these significant policy changes and the bill's progress from parents and guardians, educators, school boards and education authorities, as well as childcare and early childhood education providers. Committee provided substantial recommendations to improve the approach being taken by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, including that the department review and adjust its school funding formulae to account for new JK students, report annually on implementation of the Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices pilot project and JK, and account for after-school care in its ongoing analysis of daycare in the NWT.³

After Care

The 18th Assembly prioritized the delivery of locally and culturally appropriate methods to address mental health and addictions. In the Mandate, the GNWT committed to develop a comprehensive mental health and addictions framework enhancing access to culturally appropriate programs and services to, for example, address gaps in integrated community-based services, evaluate addictions healing programs, and enhance treatment options including aftercare.⁴ The GNWT also committed to explore innovative

³ Standing Committee on Social Development, Committee Report 10-18(2): *Report on the Review of Bill 16: An Act to Amend the Education Act* (May 30, 2017).

⁴ Commitment 4.1.1, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

ways to prevent and reduce crime that take into account mental health and addictions, such as culturally appropriate correctional programs.⁵

In December 2017, Committee visited the adult residential addictions treatment facilities in British Columbia (BC) and Alberta where NWT residents attend for residential treatment as well as a unique program for offenders with addictions within BC's corrections system to better understand the options available to Northerners. The tour showed us that the current use of southern residential placements is effective, but the Department of Health and Social Services and its partners must strengthen complementary services at home if the NWT is to be adequately served. Based on our tour and study, we developed several recommendations intended to enhance territorial addictions treatment and form a critical part of the department's action plan on addictions recovery, including in relation to the need for enhancements to community-based aftercare services and for a pilot program to connect those discharged from treatment with housing opportunities.⁶

Committee also worked in collaboration with the Minister of Justice and the Department of Justice to make several important amendments to Bill 45, *Corrections Act* to ensure that case management initiatives and programming needs are tailored to the unique needs of our inmate population, to assist with their successful rehabilitation and community reintegration and reduce recidivism.

TRANSITION MATTERS

SCOSD wishes to bring the following matters to the attention of incoming Committee Members:

NWT Housing Corporation

Housing

Another priority for the 18th Assembly was increasing the availability of safe, affordable housing and creating solutions for addressing homelessness. The territory's high cost of living is experienced most intensely by those residents who are homeless or

⁵ Commitment 4.1.2, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

⁶ Standing Committee on Social Development, Committee Report 4-18(3): Report on Adult Residential Addictions Treatment Facilities Tour 2017 (February 27, 2018).

unemployed. The GNWT has a long way to go to address the need for adequate and affordable housing, including commitments it made in the Mandate.⁷

In particular, SCOSD was troubled by the significant wait lists for public housing and the challenges associated with core housing need that persist across the NWT. Market housing remains out of reach for many. Without new public housing, the housing need in our communities cannot be reduced meaningfully. There is a need for prompt and adequate investment in a community-based approach to housing in the NWT, and the need for flexibility in determining local priorities and housing initiatives. Local governments are best positioned to understand and deliver solutions for local housing needs. The development and implementation of a territorial housing strategy, including for increasing the public housing stock and addressing homelessness across the NWT may be an avenue worth pursuing by our successor Committee.

The federal government's continued prioritization of on-reserve housing in its approach to Indigenous housing interests may be an ongoing concern. SCOSD has urged the NWT Housing Corporation to work cooperatively and swiftly with the Indigenous leaders of the NWT to advocate as partners for federal funding that is equitable and fair for all Indigenous communities in Canada. Federal funding for Indigenous housing should reflect the large size of the NWT's Indigenous population, our high costs of housing infrastructure and our complex and evolving governance landscape.

Committee also wishes to point out that residents may be better served if the NWT Housing Corporation were to invest less time and energy on developing new plans and policies and more time on execution of those plans and policies. Only through concrete actions will the NWT achieve real progress towards ensuring all residents have access to adequate, affordable and suitable housing.

Department of Justice / Department of Health and Social Services

Intimate Partner and Family Violence

Given the alarming rates of intimate partner and family violence in the NWT, Committee recommends this issue be a high priority for the next Committee. In particular, we encourage the next committee to ensure the GNWT is working to elevate the status of all women across the NWT, and to observe the performance of the A New Day Men's Healing Program and correctional programs aimed at rehabilitating perpetrators of violence and healing their victims and communities. We also encourage the committee

⁷ Commitments 3.1.1 and 3.1.3, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

to advocate for improvements to Victim Services, particularly in light of the recommendation we made in our report on Bill 45, *Corrections Act* that Victim Services be adequately resourced to raise awareness of the program and victims issues and to ensure victims are served appropriately.⁸

Department of Health and Social Services

Child and Family Services

SCOSD recommends the incoming Committee ensure that staffing in Child and Family Services reflects the core issues identified by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada in their 2018 report,⁹ and monitor the development and implementation of caseload and workload standards to ensure compliance with the *Child and Family Services Act*. We recommend the incoming Committee urge the department to go beyond a “holistic approach” and pursue a comprehensive approach through a pilot project aimed at achieving integrated case management within Child and Family Services.

Seniors

The GNWT committed in the Mandate to support seniors and elders to live in their own homes for as long as possible and ensure adequate supports are available for those who can no longer do so.¹⁰ Seniors and elders are a major growing demographic in the territory, and the GNWT must engage in thorough long-term planning to meet their needs and address the impacts that an aging population is having on our systems. New care beds will be required, and demands for homecare services will only continue to rise.

A new framework for long-term care is overdue, as is the construction of a sufficient number of seniors’ supported independent living units across the territory. We also wish to highlight our concerns about the timeliness and lack of availability of renovations programs for improving safety and accessibility for seniors and elders. The next Committee may wish to encourage the NWT Housing Corporation to increase its efforts to raise awareness and help elders and seniors access the Seniors Aging-in-Place Retrofits Program, including by making its website more navigable. Implementation of

⁸ Standing Committee on Social Development, Committee Report 34-18(3): Report on the Review of Bill 45: Corrections Act (August 20, 2019).

⁹ Auditor General of Canada, *Report to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly: Child and Family Services – Department of Health and Social Services and Health and Social Services Authorities* (October 2018).

¹⁰ Commitment 4.2.1, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

plans such as the *Continuing Care Action Plan* and the development of continuing care facilities legislation should be monitored with an eye to supporting seniors and elders to age in place and optimize their health, wellness and quality of life.

Anti-Poverty

The GNWT committed in the Mandate to work collaboratively to reduce poverty.¹¹ The next Committee is encouraged to track the progress of implementation of a renewed Anti-Poverty Action Plan, expected in August 2019. In particular, the Committee may want to work to ensure that collaboration is realized, that efforts are streamlined to focus on core poverty issues such as food security and childcare, that direct support is offered to people in poverty, and that small communities receive the support they need to meaningfully participate in anti-poverty initiatives and access anti-poverty funding.

Mental Health and Addictions

Committee believes another focus for the incoming Committee should be on monitoring implementation of the Mental Wellness and Addictions Recovery Action Plan released in June 2019, including interdepartmental collaboration on delivering a range of government services across the continuum of care.

Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Childcare

The GNWT committed in the Mandate to improve the accessibility, affordability and inclusivity of childcare.¹² We encourage the next Committee to monitor implementation of actions to make childcare more accessible and affordable.

Children and Youth

We urge the next Committee to monitor the implementation of JK as well as the impacts of the reduction in school instructional hours and of efforts to train early childhood workers and educators. Members may also wish to continue the push for affordable and accessible, if not universal, daycare for all caregivers, and for investments in daycare infrastructure.

¹¹ Commitments 4.3.7 and 4.3.12, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

¹² Commitment 3.6.2, Tabled Document 19-18(3): *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019 (Revised)*, Tabled on October 18, 2017.

Service Delivery

Limited access to programs and services in small communities is a long-standing concern. The lack of presence of frontline service workers on the ground weakens the effectiveness of government programs.

Another long-standing concern is the continued operation of government departments in silos, which creates fragmented experiences for people trying to access services. We urge the Government to provide services in a more integrated manner and to revise policies that operate at cross-purposes. Committee is pleased to see the success achieved through the integrated case management program operated by the Department of Justice in Yellowknife. This way of doing business has had proven success in other jurisdictions and has far-reaching potential to help our most vulnerable residents. Our successor Committee is urged to promote the adoption of an integrated approach in other settings, including child and family services.

Statutory Reviews

Several pieces of legislation contain requirements for review after they have come into force. During the 19th Legislative Assembly, the successor Committee may expect to review the following statutes, among others:

- Subsection 126(5) of the *Education Act* requires a review by the Minister, in consultation with the Legislative Assembly or a committee designated or established by the Assembly, of the hours of instruction within six months of the conclusion of the 2019-2020 academic year;
- Section 88.1 of the *Child and Family Services Act* requires the Legislative Assembly or a committee designated or established by the Assembly to conduct a comprehensive review of the Act and any other related subjects before April 1, 2021; and
- Section 105 of the *Mental Health Act* requires the Legislative Assembly or a committee designated or established by the Assembly to conduct a comprehensive review of the Act and other related subjects before September 1, 2023.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Social Development Report on Transition Matters. Members respectfully suggest that the Members of our successor Committee consider requesting updates on the above matters from Committee staff and from the appropriate Ministers in the 19th Assembly, and wish them the utmost success in fulfilling their mandate.